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BLACKTHORNE RECEIVES LIFE IMPRISONMENT

(SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS) This afternoon, U.S. District Judge Edward Prado sentenced 45-year-old **ALLEN BLACKTHORNE** of San Antonio to life in Federal prison for his role in the 1997 murder of his ex-wife Sheila Bellush.

On July 6, 2000, a jury convicted Blackthorne of: (1) Conspiracy to use interstate commerce facilities in the commission of murder-for-hire; and (2) Interstate domestic violence. The charges--contained in a Federal grand jury indictment returned on January 4, 2000--stem from a joint two-year-long investigation into Sheila Bellush's death. Shot and stabbed, Sheila Bellush's body was discovered on November 7, 1997, in her home in Sarasota, Florida. She was a 35-year-old wife and mother of six children--including quadruplets--at the time of her death.

Count one of the Federal indictment [18 United States Code § 1958] stated that between September 1997 and November 10, 1997, Blackthorne conspired with other individuals to cause a person to travel in interstate commerce with the intent that the murder of Mrs. Bellush be committed in violation of the laws of the state of Florida as consideration for a promise or agreement to pay a thing of value. Count two [18 USC § 2261(a)(1) & (b)(1); 18 USC § 2] stated that during a three-day period beginning on or about November 5, 1997, Blackthorne caused another person to travel from Texas to Florida to injure, harass and intimidate Mrs. Bellush. As a result of Blackthorne's actions the indictment further states, a crime of violence was committed resulting in the death of Mrs. Bellush.

This case was investigated by the Texas Rangers, Bexar County District Attorney's Office, Sarasota County (Florida) Sheriff's Department, and the State Attorney--Twelfth Judicial Circuit (Sarasota County, Florida). The San Antonio Police Department, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Division, and the United States Marshals Service also assisted in this investigation. Assistant United States Attorneys John Murphy and Richard Durbin prosecuted this case on behalf of the Government.

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